



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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1. Carp Crew – by Joe Wilkinson
2. Goose Herding Border Collie Enjoys the Good Life at Rice Lake Country Club – by Lowell Washburn [electronic photo available]

CARP CREW

By Joe Wilkinson

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From the depths of the onboard holding tank, the dip net yielded the bounty of the lake. Strong, bronze tails thrashed the water into a froth as these eight-pounders fought captivity. Hoisted from the water, the sloped faces and round mouths were more clown-like than ugly on these carp. Earlier in the day, researchers had been tracking other carp; fitted with radio transmitters to shed light on their lives and times in Clear Lake.

Sure. But....*why carp?*

“Yeah. We get that question quite a lot,” grinned researcher Chris Penne. Penne and fellow grad student Nick Ahrens are halfway through a two year study, tracking the ugly, unwanted rough fish; part of a study between the Iowa State University based Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research unit and the Department of Natural Resources. “We explain to people that the carp population is too high in the lake,” explains Ahrens. “As carp feed, they stir up sediment and uproot aquatic vegetation. That has a negative impact on water quality and on game fish.”

Many outdoor enthusiasts are familiar with radio telemetry. Everything from deer and bobcats to turtles and peregrine falcons have been tracked at one time or another in Iowa. Just a few weeks ago, I rode with a crew following flathead catfish; concerned about potentially dwindling numbers and habitat in interior streams. Carp, though, seem pretty well entrenched in Iowa water. Having been introduced by 19th Century sportsmen, longing for European sport fishing, they eventually overran many lakes and rivers—the carp, not the sportsmen. That’s where this ‘Carp Crew’ takes the stage; concerned not with stabilizing or improving conditions for the target species, but *reducing* their numbers.

Commercial fishing nets about 100,000 pounds of rough fish each year from Clear Lake; half of it carp. Sounds like a lot, but it is a yield of only 30 pounds an acre on this 3,600-acre lake. "We estimate 150 to 300 pounds an acre is possible," suggests DNR fisheries biologist Jim Wahl. "We would like to see carp harvest in the 50 percent range to make a good dent in the population."

That's a tall order for commercial fishing operations. This study, though, will reduce the guesswork. "We are seeing trends (and) getting good information," advises Penne. "In the winter, carp tend to school up in large numbers. We actually found 23 of our 30 (radio-tagged) adults within 100 meters of each other! During spring, they tend to run in shallow in the west end of their lake, probably due to spawning. Post-spawn, they move out to deeper waters."

Should the research hold, it will be valuable; here and on other lakes where rough fish have become major problems. Commercial fisherman could work more efficiently; targeting certain areas at certain times of the year to increase their haul.

Aiming the 14-foot wide mast to hone in on various frequencies, Penne and Ahren located carp '151.' The eight-pounder was 200 yards out from shore, in five feet of water. A week prior, he was grubbing through cattail beds on the west edge of the lake. Meanwhile, '48.301' (each ID comes from a fish's transmitter frequency) was skittish. "He seems to move every time we come close in the boat," recalls Ahrens. "He doesn't like to sit still." The researchers also surgically implanted transmitters in eight to 10-inch juvenile carp this spring. That gave them important data on smaller fish, before their 90-day batteries expired.

"We track lots of variables; not just calendar movements," notes Penne. "What depths they hold in, at certain times of the year; even where they go after precipitation or a temperature change." He points to Ventura Marsh, separated from the west end of Clear Lake by a low causeway and a human-built 'grade' which keeps fish from filling its muddy shallows. Rough fish here were removed several years ago. "The water quality increased when we removed the rough fish in Ventura Marsh," notes Penne. "By increasing removal in a lake, we think we would see a dramatic improvement in water quality...and more habitat for the game fish that anglers pursue."

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GOOSE HERDING BORDER COLLIE ENJOYS THE GOOD LIFE AT RICE LAKE COUNTRY CLUB

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

LAKE MILLS--Roy is the friendliest guy you'll ever meet. He loves people, he

loves life, and, above all, he loves his job. And who wouldn't?

Roy has never been in debt. He's never paid a single bill. He spends most of his year on the golf course, and chases wild geese whenever he feels like it.

Up on Main Street, the local residents --- at least those who gather at the Grand Cafe each day for morning coffee --- all agree that Roy is leading nothing short of a dog's life. It's hard for anyone to argue the point. You see, Roy really is a dog -- a high-test, purebred border collie to be exact.

Roy is currently a full time employee of Winnebago county's Rice Lake Country Club. Located near the south shore of Rice Lake, the Country Club is an 18-hole, 125 acre, public golf course. Beautifully landscaped and interspersed with crystal clear ponds, it is nothing short of a golfer's paradise.

Rice Lake is also home to Iowa's largest concentration of Canada geese. During late autumn peak numbers may reach, and sometimes exceed, 45,000 birds. Attracting large numbers of sightseers and hunters, the geese have a significant and positive impact on local economies while providing widespread recreational opportunities. But when a large number of those same honkers drop by to visit the local Country Club, they are no longer viewed as an asset.

"At times, the geese have really become a problem here," says Bob Berger, course manager for the Rice Lake Country Club.

"During summer, the geese leave droppings which makes them unpopular with members and may have resulted in some loss of business. During fall and winter, goose numbers build and that's when the birds can inflict severe damage to the course."

In November of 2003, Berger reported a flock containing over 4,000 Canada geese on a single fairway. The grazing honkers took some spots right down to the dirt, and around thirty percent of two putting surfaces [greens] were completely destroyed.

"We tried things like shell crackers, but the geese were too smart and caught on," said Berger. "Then John Hunchis, who is one of our board members, saw where people in other parts of the country were using dogs to herd geese. He lives next to the course and offered to house a dog if the Country Club wanted to get one."

The board met and decided to give the idea a try. In June 2004, Roy was purchased for 3,300 dollars from Kuyendall's, a North Carolina kennel that specializes in training border collies to herd problem Canadas. The dog arrived fully trained, and even came with a warranty that promised the collie would faithfully execute his duties.

"Once Roy arrived it was mainly a matter of making him feel at home and get used to the new surroundings," said Berger. "We didn't need to teach him anything about herding, he already knew that."

"Most of the work here has been done around ponds because that's where the geese like to be. Roy has been great around water. The trainers in North Carolina said he's the best swimmer they've ever seen, and we believe it."

"Once a flock is chased into a pond, Roy jumps right in after them. The geese usually separate. Roy picks the one he wants and herds it until the bird gives up and flies off. Once that bird leaves, he picks another."

Berger is quick to point out that Roy is a herder and not a hunter. When goose families [with young goslings] walk onto the course, the collie's focus is to move rather than catch the flightless youngsters.

With one full year of professional goose herding under his belt, Roy is currently receiving rave reviews. There are no more goose droppings near the ponds, on greens, or on trendy golf shoes. Total turf damage has been reduced by an astounding 99 percent.

"I think the geese are getting the message," says Berger. "As long as Roy is on the course, the program is working. In June [2005] we only observed geese about once a week which is a dramatic decrease from what we've had in the past."

"Our members are very happy. I don't think there's any doubt this dog will pay for itself."

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